I, IAN MÒR, at your wish, send to you, who are my friend, this tale of remembrance, because you, who have written of her, loved Mary Maclean, that sweet and serene spirit, though you knew her only when she was old.

And with it are other pages, which are for no eyes but yours: the opening pages of a book that shall never be read of any, for it is little more than begun, and now perforce must be relinquished. I know that the bird who sings in lonely hearts has, for one heart, sung his last song. He is blind, the little one; yet, for all that, sings his most poignant bitter song when loneliness itself is no more a starless dusk, but its own infinite night.

The book was to be called *The Man Who Dreamed;* and it was to be yours. A gift of sand and foam. But you, I know, will remember that with sand I built palaces that were to withstand winds and tides, and that foam is the visible breath of the broken wave.

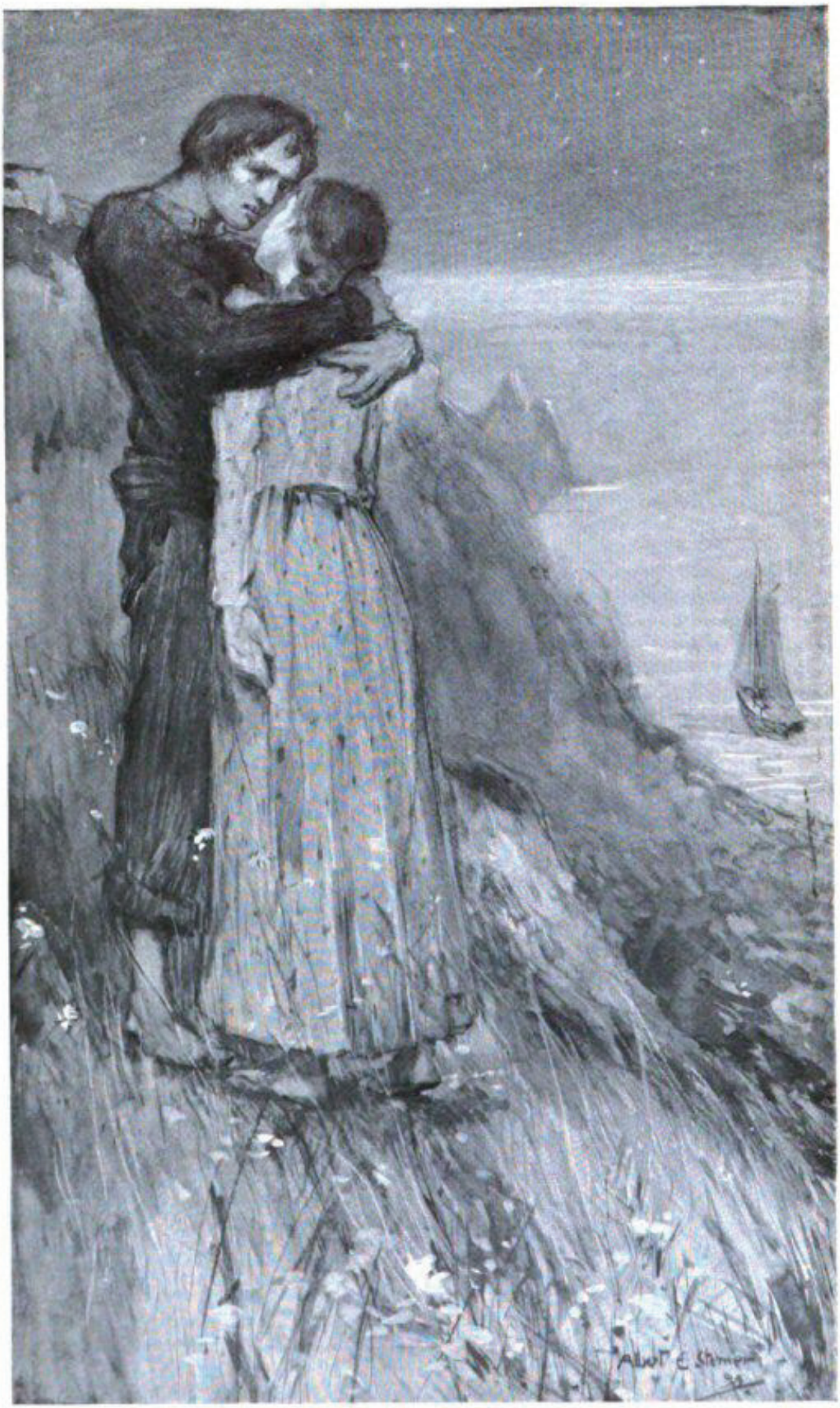
Long ago I told you the tale out of which you wrought your island romance, *Pharais.* Not that it was all an echo of things heard, for there upon Innisròn you yourself hearkened often to the ancient threnodies of the sea; once you saw Alasdair, before love filled with dusk his dreaming mind; and Lora you saw, fawn of beauty; and with Mary Maclean you dwelled for many days, when she was wont to go often to two graves where the tangled sea-grasses whispered the secret of the moaning wave.

You knew Mary Maclean and her deep eyes of love, and the white peace that was upon her, and the Sabbath stillness on her face because of the greatness and the wonder of the hushed tenderness that was there. She has quiet now, where she lies in a green hollow, a stone's-throw from where Alasdair's twilight has long become darkness itself, and where Lora's shadowy hair, that he loved, interwinds in the fibres of the sea-pink and the poignant thyme.

But, as I know, you never heard the story of how Mary came to put her life into the life of Eachain Maclean, so that they were made one. I will tell you that now.

When Mary Macleod was a girl she had eyes so large and brooding, and of a blue so shadow-woven, that Pòl the Freckled, the young island poet, who sailed in among the sea-caves of Miuley and never sailed forth from them again, made a song about her, wherein he called her Mary of the Tarns. Another than Pòl the Freckled thought so too, and loved to look into those dark pools of dream, and to see there the shadow of immemorial beauty. This other was Angus Macleod. He was a youth, till one night, as he hauled in the herring-nets in the moonshine, he heard a voice that was continuously lost in a myriad faint echoes — heard with each wave that lifted a momentary torch out of the dark, only to pass in a universe of foam bells and dancing stars. It was the voice of Mary of the Tarns, or thus was he persuaded.

In that hour he was suddenly become a man.



"THEY SAID NO MORE."

It is in some shadowy vale in the dreamland of sleep that Love oftenest whispers his first word. There, night after night, under the star of dreams, Mary put her hand into the hand of Angus, whom in the shy silences of her waking hours secretly she loved; and there, often and long, Angus looked into the eyes of Mary of the Tarns.

Then the day came when a silver trumpet was blown from a high tower, and banners and the noise of an army filled the air, and the stars leaped, and a new sun and a new moon flamed in the sky.

Ah, sweet hyperboles of love, how wild as any falling star! And yet, how sweet the dear hyperboles of truth!—for is not the awakening of the triumphant passion of love great and moving as a marching army with banners, as abruptly clamant as the blast of a silver trumpet blown suddenly from over the bastions of the towers of silence?

It was in summer, when there is no night among these Northern isles. The long hot days waned through a sustained after-glow of rose and violet, and when the stars came it was only to reveal purple depths within depths.

Mary was walking, barefoot, through the dewy grass, on the long western slope of Innisròn, and looking idly at the phantom flake of the moon as it hung like a blown moth above the vast disclosure of the flower of sunset. Below it, beyond her, the ocean. It was pale, opalescent; here shimmering with the hues of the moonbow, here dusked with violet shadow, but for the most part pale, opalescent. There was no wind, but a breath arose from the innumerous lips of the sea. The cool sigh moved inland, and made a continual faint tremor amid the salt grasses. The skuas and guillemots stirred, and at long intervals stridently screamed.

Mary looked long seaward. The illimitable, pale, unlifted wave; the hinted dusk of the quiet underwaters; the unfathomable violet gulfs overhead: these silent comrades were not alien to her. To them she was a moving shadow on an isle; to her they were the veils of wonder beyond which the soul knows no death, but looks upon the face of Beauty, and upon the eyes of Love, and upon the heart of Peace.

Amid these silent spaces two dark objects caught the girl's wandering gaze. Flying eastward, a solan trailed a dusky wing across the sky. So high its flight that the first glance saw it as though motionless; yet, even while Mary looked, the skyey wayfarer waned suddenly, and that which had been was not. The other object had wings too, but was not a bird. A fishing-smack lay idly becalmed, her red-brown sail now a patch of warm dusk. Mary knew what boat it was—the *Nighean Donn*, out of Fionnaphort in Ithona, the westernmost of the Iarraidh Isles.

There was no one visible on board the *Nighean Donn*, but a boy's voice sang a monotonous Gaelic cadence, indescribably sweet as it came, remote and wild as an air out of a dim forgotten world, across the still waters. Mary Macleod knew the song, a strange *iorram* or boat-song made by Pòl the Freckled, and by him given to his friend Angus Macleod of Ithona. She muttered the words over and over, as the lilt of the boyish voice rose and fell:

"It is not only when the sea is dark and chill and desolate
I hear the singing of the queen who lives beneath the ocean;
Oft have I heard her chanting voice when noon o'erfloods his golden gate,
Or when the moonshine fills the wave with snow-white mazy motion.

"And some day will it hap to me, when the black waves are leaping,
Or when within the breathless green I see her shell-strewn door,
That singing voice will lure me where my sea-drown'd love lies sleeping
Beneath the slow white hands of her who rules the sunken shore.

"For in my heart I hear the bells that ring their fatal beauty,
The wild, remote, uncertain bells that chant their lonely sorrow;
The lonely bells of sorrow, the bells of fatal beauty,
Oft in my heart I hear the bells, who soon shall know no morrow."

The slow splashing of oars in the great hollow cavern underneath her feet sent a flush to her face. She knew who was there—that it was the little boat of the *Nighean Donn*, and that Angus Macleod was in it.

She stood among the seeding grasses, intent. The cluster of white moon-daisies that reached to her knees was not more pale than her white face: for a white silence was upon Mary Macleod in her dreaming girlhood, as in her later years.

She shivered once as she listened to

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"WHAT HAD BEEN, WAS NOT."

Angus singing, while he secured his boat, and began to climb from ledge to ledge. He too had heard the lad Uille Ban chanting as he lay idly upon a coil of rope, while the smack lay derelict on the unmoving waters; and hearing, had himself taken up the song:

"For in my heart I hear the bells that ring their fatal beauty,
The wild, remote, uncertain bells that chant their lonely sorrow:
The lonely bells of sorrow, the bells of fatal beauty,
Oft in my heart I hear the bells, who soon shall know no morrow."

Mary shivered with the vague fear that had come upon her. Had she not dreamed, in the bygone night, that she heard some one in the sea singing that very song—some one with slow white hands which waved idly above a dead man? A moment ago she had listened to the same song sung by the lad Uille Ban; and now, for the third time, she heard Angus idly chanting it as he rose invisibly from ledge to ledge of the cavern underneath her. Three idle songs; yet is not death but the final, the interrupted, refrain of an idle song?

When Angus leaped on to the slope and came towards her, she felt her pulse quicken. Tall and fair, he looked fairer and taller than she had ever seen him. The light that was still in the west lingered in his hair, which, yellow as it was, now glistered as with the sheen of bronze. He had left his cap in the boat, and as he crossed swiftly towards her she realized anew that he deserved the name given him by Pòl the poet—Angus Ogue Gruagach—the yellow-haired god. They had never yet spoken of their love, and now both realized in a flash that no words were needed. At midsummer noon no one says the sun shines.

Angus came forward with outreaching hands. "Dear, dear love!" he whispered. "Mhairi mo rùn, muirnean, mochree!"

She put her hands in his; she put her lips to his; she put her head to his breast, and listened, all her life throbbing in response, to the leaping pulse of the heart that loved her.

"Dear, dear love!" he whispered again.

"Angus!" she murmured.

They said no more, but moved slowly onward, hand in hand.

The night had their secret. For sure, it was in the low crooning of the deep when the tide put its whispering lips against the sleeping sea; it was in the spellbound silences of the isle; it was in the phantasmal light of the stars—the stars of dream, in a sky of dream, in a world of dream. When, an hour—or was it an eternity, or a minute?—later, they turned, she to her home near the clachan of Innisròn, he to his boat, a light air had come up on the forehead of the tide. The sail of the *Nighean Donn* flapped, a dusky wing in the darkness. The penetrating smell of sea-mist was in the air.

Mary had only one regret as she turned her face inland, when once the invisibly gathering mist hid from her even the blurred semblance of the smack: that she had not asked Angus to sing no more that song of Pòl the Freckled, which vaguely she feared, and even hated. She had stood listening to the splashing of the oars, and, later, to the voices of Angus and Uille Ban; and now, coming faintly and to her weirdly through the gloom, she heard her lover's voice chanting the words again. What made him sing that song, in that hour, on this day of all days?

"For in my heart I hear the bells that ring their fatal beauty,
The wild, remote, uncertain bells that chant their lonely sorrow:
The lonely bells of sorrow, the bells of fatal beauty,
Oft in my heart I hear the bells, who soon shall know no morrow."

But long before she was back at the peat fire again she forgot that sad, haunting cadence, and remembered only his words—the dear words of him whom she loved, as he came towards her, across the dewy grass, with outreaching hands:

"Dear, dear love!... mhairi mo rùn, muirnean, mochree!"

She saw them in the leaping shadows in the little room; in the red glow that flickered along the fringes of the peats; in the darkness which like a sea drowned the lonely croft. She heard them in the bubble of the meal, as slowly with wooden spurtle she stirred the porridge; she heard them in the rising wind that had come in with the tide; she heard them in the long relinquishing rush and multitudinously gathering inroar as the hands of the Atlantic tore at the shingly beaches of Innisròn Haven.

After the smooring of the peats, and when the two old people, the father of her father and his white-haired wife, were asleep, she sat for a long time in the warm darkness. From a cranny in the

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peat ash a smouldering flame looked out comfortingly. In the girl's heart a great peace was come, as well as a great joy. She had dwelled so long with silence that she knew its eloquent secrets: and it was sweet to sit there in the dusk, and listen, and commune with silence, and dream.

Above the long, deliberate roar and resurge of the tidal waters round the piled beaches she could hear a dull, rhythmic beat. It was the screw of some great steamer, churning its way through the darkness: a stranger, surely, for she knew the times and seasons of every vessel that came near these lonely isles. Sometimes it happened that the Uist or Tiree steamers passed that way; doubtless it was the Tiree boat, or possibly the big steamer that once or twice in the summer fared northward to far-off St. Kilda.

She must have slept, and the sound have passed into her ears as an echo into a shell; for when, with a start, she arose, she still heard the thud-thud of the screw, although the boat had long passed away.

It was the cry of a sea-bird which had startled her. Once—twice—the scream had whirled about the house. Mary listened, intent. Once more it came, and at the same moment she saw a drift of white press up against the window.

She sprang to her feet, startled.

"It is the cry of a heron," she muttered, with dry lips; "but who has heard tell of a white heron?—and the bird there is white as a snow wreath."

Some uncontrollable impulse made her hesitate. She moved to go to the window, to see if the bird were wounded, but she could not. Sobbing with inexplicable fear, she turned and fled, and a moment later was in her own little room. There all her fear passed. Yet she could not sleep for long. If only she could get the sound of that beating screw out of her ears, she thought. But she could not, neither waking nor sleeping; nor the following day; nor any day thereafter; and when she died, doubtless she heard the thud-thud of a screw as it churned the dark waters in a night of shrouding mist.

For on the morrow she learned that the *Nighean Donn* had been run down in the mist, a mile south of Ithona, by an unknown steamer. She came out of the darkness, ruining; she passed into the darkness again, leaving ruin behind. Perhaps the officer in command thought that his vessel had run into some floating wreckage; for there was no cry heard, and no lights had been seen. Only one body was found—that of the boy Uille Ban.

When heart-breaking sorrow comes, there is no room for words. Mary Macleod said little; what, indeed, was there to say? The clansfolk gave what kindly comfort they could. The old minister, when next he came to Innisròn, spoke of the will of God and the Life Eternal.

Mary bowed her head. What had been, was not: could any words, could any solace, better that?

"You are young, Mary," said Mr. Macdonald, when he had prayed with her. "God will not leave you desolate."

She turned her white face, with her great, brooding, dusky eyes, upon him.

"Will He give me back Angus?" she said, in her low still voice, that had the hush in it of lonely places.

He could not tell her so.

"It was to be," she said, breaking the long silence that had fallen between them.

"Ay," the minister answered.

She looked at him, and then took his hand. "I am thanking you, Mr. Macdonald, for the good words you have put upon my sorrow. But I am not wishing that any more be said to me. I must go now, for I have to see to the milking, an' I hear the poor beasts lowing on the hill-side. The old folk too are weary, and I must be getting them their porridge."

After that no one ever heard Mary Macleod speak of Angus. She was a good lass, all agreed, and made no moan; and there was no croft tidier than Scaur-a-van, and because of her it was; and she made butter better than any on Innisròn; and in the isles there was no cheese like the Scaur-a-van cheese.

Had there been any kith or kin of Angus, she would have made them hers. She took the consumptive mother of Uille Ban from Ithona, and kept her safe-havened at Scaur-a-van, till the woman sat up one night in her bed, and cried in a loud voice that Uille Ban was standing by her side and playing a wild air on the strings of her heart, which he had in his hands, and the strings were breaking, she cried. They broke, and Mary envied her, and the whispering joy she would be having with Uille Ban. But Angus had no near kin. Perhaps, she thought, he would miss her the more where he had gone. He had a friend, whom she had never seen. He was a man of Iona, and was named Eachain

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MacEachain Maclean. He and Angus had been boys in the same boat, and sailed thrice to Iceland together, and once to Peterhead, that maybe was as far or farther, or perhaps among the stranger-folk further east. Mary knew little geography, though she could steer by the stars. To this friend she wrote, through the minister, to say that if ever he was in trouble he was to come to her.

It was on the third night after the sinking of the *Nighean Donn* that Mary walked alone, beyond the shingle beaches, and where the ledges of trap run darkly into deep water. It was a still night and clear. The lambs and ewes were restless in the moonshine, for their bleating filled the upper solitudes. A shoal of mackerel made a sputtering, splashing sound beyond the skerries outside the haven. The ebb, sucking at the weedy extremes of the ledges, caused a continuous bubbling sound. There was no stir of air, only a breath upon the sea; but, immeasurably remote overhead, frayed clouds, like trailed nets in yellow gulfs of moonlight, shot flame-shaped points into the dark, and seemed to lick the stars as these shook in the wind. "No mist to-night," Mary muttered; then, startled by her own words, repeated, and again repeated, "There will be no mist to-night."

Then she stood as though become stone. Before her, on a solitary rock, a great bird sat. It was a heron. In the moonshine its plumage glistened white as foam of the sea; white as one of her lambs it was.

She had never seen, never heard of, a white heron. There was some old Gaelic song—what was it?—no, she could not remember—something about the souls of the dead. The words would not come.

Slowly she advanced. The heron did not stir. Suddenly she fell upon her knees, and reached out her arms, and her hair fell about her shoulders, and her heart beat against her throat, and the grave gave up its sorrow, and she cried:

"Oh, Angus, Angus, my beloved! Angus, Angus, my dear, dear love!"

She heard nothing, saw nothing, felt nothing, knew nothing, till, numbed and weak, she stirred with a cry, for some creeping thing of the sea had crossed her hand. She rose and stared about her. There was nothing that she need fear. The moon rays danced on a glimmering sea-pasture far out upon the water; their lances and javelins flashed and glinted merrily. A dog barked as she crossed the flag-stones at Scaur-a-van, then suddenly began a strange furtive baying. She called: "Luath! Luath!"

The dog was silent a moment, then threw its head back and howled, abruptly breaking again into a sustained baying. The echo swept from croft to croft, and wakened every dog upon the isle.

Mary looked back. Slowly circling behind her she saw the white heron. With a cry, she fled into the house.

For three nights thereafter she saw the white heron. On the third she had no fear. She followed the foam-white bird, and when she could not see it, then she followed its wild plaintive cry. At dawn she was still at Ardfeulan, on the western side of Innisròn; but her arms were round the drowned heart whose pulse she had heard leap so swift in joy, and her lips put a vain warmth against the dear face that was wan as spent foam, and as chill as that.

Three years after that day Mary saw again the white heron. She was alone now, and she was glad, for she thought Angus had come, and she was ready.

Yet neither death nor sorrow happened. Thrice, night after night, she saw the white gleam of nocturnal wings, heard the strange bewildering cry.

It was on the fourth day, when a fierce gale covered the isle with a mist of driving spray. No Innisròn boat was outside the haven; for that, all were glad. But in the late afternoon a cry went from mouth to mouth.

There was a fishing-coble on the skerries! That meant death for all on board, for sure, for nothing could be done. The moment came soon. A vast drowning billow leaped forward, and when the cloud of spray had scattered, there was no coble to be seen. Only one man was washed ashore, nigh dead, upon the spar he clung to. His name was Eachain MacEachain, son of a Maclean of Iona.

And that was how Mary Macleod met the friend of Angus, and he a ruined man, and how she put her life to his, and they were made one.

Her man .... yes, he was her man, to whom she was loyal and true, and whom she loved right well for many years. But she knew, and he too knew well, that she had wedded one man in her heart, and that no other could take his place there, then or forever. She had one husband

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only, but it was not he to whom she was wed, but Angus the son of Alasdair—him whom she loved with the deep love that surpasseth all wisdom of the world that ever was, or is, or shall be.

And Eachain her man lived out his years with her, and was content, though he knew well that in her silent heart his wife, who loved him well, had only one lover, one dream, one hope, one passion, one remembrance, one husband. For the women who love out of the depths of life may love many deeply and truly, but below all, through all, above all, is the one love. For there is but one love, and that is the love which passeth knowledge, and goeth down into hell or into the depths of heaven, and is crowned, and is immortal, with a deathless star above it for evermore.

And if Mary Maclean knew this, so also did Angus, where he waited afar. They lie who say that love perisheth.

God give us flame to endure!